

## Impact case study (REF3b)

<b>Institution:</b> University of Southampton
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 29 English Language and Literature
<b>Title of case study:</b> 29-04 Reimagining Performance
<p><b>1. Summary of the impact</b></p> <p>Research undertaken at the University of Southampton has supplied new ways of imagining literature written for performance, and performances described in the historical record. The work has had notable impacts on teachers and learners of all ages. Impact has been achieved through different types of educational activity, including public-facing websites and books, Continual Professional Development (CPD) for school and university teachers, Life-Long Learning (LLL) events, and practical workshops for primary and secondary school students. The research has brought financial benefit to the publishing industry, and has caused a major publisher to commission a new edition of the poetry of Stevie Smith.</p>
<p><b>2. Underpinning research</b></p> <p>Language describing performance, or written to be performed, is often difficult to read or understand. This is because it requires readers to imagine directions for movement, visual effects, and sound that are in many cases only implied. Research undertaken at the University of Southampton by John McGavin, Ros King, and Will May demonstrates that by picking up on the subtle performance cues embedded in language for and about performance, modern audiences can enhance their understanding—and enjoyment—of these texts. These findings apply to drama and non-dramatic poetry, both sung and spoken, as well as to written accounts of non-literary events.</p> <p>McGavin began his career at Southampton in 1975 and has held his current post of Professor since 2007, becoming chair in 2013 of Records of Early English Drama (REED), an international scholarly project to edit and publish the primary sources for early theatre and performance. He analyses medieval and early modern documentary records including: financial accounts relating to performances; eye-witness descriptions of performance; and records of theatricalised social interactions such as processions, shaming rituals, and May games. He shows that eyewitness accounts of an event are defined by the spectator's cultural parameters, by the reasons for making a record, and by the recording conventions used. He demonstrates that even the briefest financial record can provide evidence for reimagining historical performances. He argues that previous analysis of early modern drama was limited by its repeated reiteration of a restricted range of evidence [3.1; 3.2].</p> <p>King was appointed Professor of English Studies at the University of Southampton in 2006, and to the Board of Directors of the Nuffield Theatre, Southampton, in 2013. She also analyses historical records of performance, but combines this with investigations into the emotional and mental effects of an author's word choices on speakers and audiences. Her work combines academic archival study with practice-led research that includes workshops with students of all ages, teachers, actors and directors. She debunks the common assumption that the works of Shakespeare are difficult to understand because of their 'archaic' language, showing instead that his language choices have physiological effects on speakers. She argues that even inexperienced readers, once enabled to <i>embody</i> difficult texts, find them to be both emotionally and intellectually satisfying [3.3; 3.4].</p> <p>May joined the University of Southampton in 2008 and is now a Senior Lecturer. He is also a published poet and composer. Since 2008, his work has explored the relationship between contemporary music and poetry. Like King, May also links language and performance with reception by analysing the poet Stevie Smith's own illustrations, notebooks, and recorded performances held by the McFarlin Library, University of Tulsa. He has developed a new critical language for sung poetry. He found that poems, like plays, have a performance history, which creates a dynamic relationship with the published texts and with notions of final authorial intention.</p>

**Impact case study (REF3b)**

He also shows how audience accounts of poetry performances, and poets' spoken introductions to their work, can inform subsequent editions of printed texts [3.5]. He argues that audiences new to poetry are able to engage more fully when poetry is accompanied by illustrations or set to music [3.6].

All three researchers show connections between the physiological, psychological, and therefore emotional dimensions of performance. They argue that all readers can be helped to understand the verbal relics of past performance when they learn how to unlock the physicality embedded in language.

**3. References to the research****Outputs**

- [1] McGavin, 'Performing Communities: civic religious drama' (*The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Literature in English*, eds Walker and Treharne, Oxford University Press, 2010), 200-218.
- [2] McGavin, *Theatricality and Narrative in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland* (Ashgate, 2007) 172pp., winner of the Frank Watson Prize for the best book published on Scottish History (2009).
- [3] King, *Shakespeare: A Beginner's Guide* (Oneworld Publishing, 2011), 193 pp., 1,868 paper back copies sold (June 2013; RRP £9.99; Kindle edition £4.94; Audio edition £19.05).
- [4] King, 'What are we doing when we're 'doing Shakespeare'? The Embodied brain in Theatrical Experience', inaugural lecture, University of Southampton, 2011, keynote at the Contemporary Shakespeare Conference, Hildesheim, June 2012, delivered as a seminar paper at the World Shakespeare Congress in Prague, 2011, and selected from several hundred papers for publication in the conference proceedings (forthcoming; available from the University on request).
- [5] May, *Stevie Smith and Authorship*, (Oxford University Press, 2010), 256pp. This won the CCUE Book Prize for the best scholarly book by an ECR (2011), and an honourable mention in the ESSE Book Awards, 2012.
- [6] May, 'The Siren Alps: text-setting and gender' in *Contemporary Music Review*, 29, (2), 201-13 (2010), a special issue, also edited by May.

**Grants**

- PI: McGavin, with CI Bradley (Digital Humanities, KCL), 'Records of Early English Drama, Middlesex/Westminster: Eight Theatres North of the Thames', AHRC and SSHRC (Canada). 1 October 2007 to 1 April 2011, £496,101.25.
- PI: McGavin (grant awarded to Sally-Beth MacLean, REED Toronto), 'Learning Zone for Early Modern London Theatres database (EMLoT)'; SSHRC, 12 months Feb 2010 to Feb 2011, \$C98k.
- PI: King, with May *et al*, 'Supporting Student Outreach through a Teachers' Network'; HEA Department Development grant, March 2012 to May 2013; £29,972, plus match funding from the Faculty of Humanities at Southampton, including a grant of £2,600 from the endowed Edyth Jeffries Shakespeare Project.

**4. Details of the impact**

The research described has had notable impacts on education, benefitting both teachers and students. It has enriched cultural study, and made literary texts accessible and enjoyable to learners of all ages. It has also delivered economic benefit to the publishing industry.

McGavin's Early Modern London Theatres (EMLoT) website—a collaboration between King's College London; REED; Royal Holloway College, London; the Institute of Historical Research; and

## Impact case study (REF3b)

Globe Education—has been widely reported in the national press (*Daily Telegraph*, *Daily Express*, and *Mirror* newspapers). Since its launch in February 2011, the site has achieved global reach [ref: Google Analytics, 30 Oct 2013] and has had over 8,000 visitors from 96 countries. This success led to a further grant from the Mellon Foundation for the second phase of the project and a 5 year grant commitment from the British Academy to enable REED to extend the content included on the website to the theatres and animal baiting areas on the Bankside [5.1; 5.2].

The researchers have delivered more than 40 lectures in schools and colleges, and for the university's TEAtime scheme for schools, as well as numerous talks at LLL events for the general public. Talks held at the university are recorded as podcasts and made freely available. E.g. the 'Henry V' LLL study day, held in March 2013, was attended by approximately 80 people; attendees commented that King's talk 'enabled me to approach Shakespeare's *Henry V* in a new way, which has inspired new ideas for teaching', and that King 'provided new sharp insight into the text' [5.3]. Between them, McGavin and King have delivered 8 lectures under BBC Business Editor Robert Peston's 'Speakers for Schools' programme. Founded in 2011, the scheme organises free talks with inspirational speakers at state schools. The Head of English at Richard Taunton College wrote of one of King's workshops 'They were really buzzing after their session with you'; one pupil at West Somerset College wrote 'Sir [McGavin] really made me think and I don't do that often' [5.4; 5.5]. In March 2009, May worked with poet Maggie Harris and composer Nitin Sawhney to organise a day of workshops at the Nuffield Theatre and the Turner Sims Concert Hall, focusing on the relationship between poetry and song. Over 100 year 6 and year 7 school students attended from the local area; teachers were impressed with the way the workshops stimulated improvisation and gave pupils the courage to perform in public. Funded by the South East Universities' Creative Campus Initiative (CCI), the event culminated in a public talk by Sawhney, which drew on May's research. The talk was attended by over 150 people, was documented in the local press, and featured in the CCI Cultural Olympiad bus tour [5.6]. In total, the group has engaged with approximately 5,000 students in 5 counties between 2008 and 2013.

Since 2010, researchers have delivered 7 CPD workshops to teachers, covering topics from Shakespeare to creative writing. One of the most popular is King's 'Playing with Shakespeare' study day (annual since 2011), run in conjunction with theatre director Patrick Sandford of the Nuffield, and delivered to approximately 120 teachers from Hampshire, Dorset, and the Isle of Wight. One participant described King's study day as the 'best training day I've ever been on'; another requested more of the same [5.3]. King's session 'Feeling Shakespeare's Language' was also delivered as part of the British Shakespeare Association Conference (February 2012), attended by 30 teachers and theatre professionals from the UK, Europe, and the US. In 2012, with funding from the Higher Education Academy, the researchers founded a teachers' network, which currently has more than 40 members across the region. As well as becoming a vehicle through which to deliver CPD, network members provide support to Southampton undergraduates who are helping disseminate the research through their own workshops at local primary and secondary schools. Podcasts from the events are available on the project website [5.7].

May has also given workshops to overseas university teachers and students. Since 2009, he has contributed 3 keynotes and workshops to the Oxford-Perm Literature Seminar, which typically attracts around 100 participants from 63 universities across the former Soviet Union [5.8]. May's student guide, *Postwar Literature: 1950 to 1990* (York Notes Companions, Longman, 2010; RRP £11.25) has also been distributed free to all participants at the Perm summer schools. A 2013 review by Marina Ragachewskaya of Minsk State Linguistics University stated that it had provided her with essential support for her postdoctoral work. In March 2012, May delivered a webinar on the musical settings of Emily Dickinson's poetry via *Peripeteia*, a website for students of A-level English; 20 students participated in the webinar, and the site and resources have over 1,000 regular users [5.9].

## Impact case study (REF3b)

**Sustainability**

Publishers are benefitting financially through the distribution of King's *Shakespeare: A Beginner's Guide* in paperback, Kindle, and audio editions [3.3]. In response to May's prize-winning monograph, *Stevie Smith and Authorship*, publishers Faber and Faber decided to bring Smith's work back into print, and commissioned him to edit a new edition of her *Collected Poems*. Faber's poetry editor Matthew Hollis said: 'I was particularly interested in [May's] skilful account of the publishing history. Faber recently acquired rights in Stevie's work from Penguin, so I invited May to prepare a new edition of the *Collected Poems* that brings readers to the poetry in the numbers that it deserves' [5.10]. There are ongoing plans to disseminate the group's research in a variety of public media. McGavin's experience of communicating research via the internet has led to a proposal to house the REED pre-publication data on a freely accessible website, hosted by the University of Southampton. King's role as dramaturg for a planned production of *Henry V* at the Nuffield Theatre in 2015 is envisaged as a knowledge exchange opportunity, enabling her to test further her theories on embodiment with a professional director and actors. A full programme of educational events will accompany this production.

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact****Sources of corroboration**

1. <http://www.emlot.kcl.ac.uk/>
2. Director, Globe Education.
3. File of corroboratory evidence for LLL, CPD, and workshop events (available from the UoA).
4. Head of English, Richard Taunton Sixth Form College, Southampton.
5. Deputy Principal: Student Learning & Support, at West Somerset College.
6. File of evidence for Creative Campus Initiative (available from the UoA).
7. HEA teachers network website: <http://www.southampton.ac.uk/englishteachersnetwork>
8. Oxford-Perm Literature convener;  
[http://oxfordrussia.ru/media/files/Programme\\_eng\\_fiction\\_2009%20\(1\).pdf](http://oxfordrussia.ru/media/files/Programme_eng_fiction_2009%20(1).pdf)
9. <http://peripeteia.webs.com/>. Screen capture of the webinar section (available from the UoA)  
Director of *Peripeteia* website, and Head of English, Wells Cathedral School.
10. Letter from Poetry Editor, Faber and Faber Ltd.